

University of Madras Graduation Ceremony
June 14, 2010
Remarks by Bryan Dalton, Acting Consul General
U.S. Consulate General Chennai

Greetings: Vice Chancellor –Col. Dr G. Thiruvassagam
The Registrar: Dr P Saravanan and
The Controller of Examinations: Dr. T. Leo Alexander

Good morning. I am honored to be invited to this very special event, the first ever graduation ceremony of the University of Madras. The U.S. Consulate is proud of our long standing relationship with this university. My colleagues at the consulate as well as visiting American experts regularly engage with the academic community of the college in interactions on a variety of themes. We are also happy that the U.S. Consulate could contribute to the restoration of the historic Senate House of Madras University, originally built in 1857.

Allow me to congratulate all of you working at the University of Madras, one of the oldest universities in India. I greatly appreciate the role of the University in uplifting the educational standards in Southern India and beyond since its inception in September 1857. The university continues to foster the academic and artistic creative abilities and talents of the students, with the goal of developing them as individuals with character, vision and resourcefulness. Clearly, you have succeeded.

As President Obama says, “The relationship between the United States and India will be one of the defining partnerships of the 21st century.” This relationship is fundamentally unique -- because, as our strategy explains, we share common interests, but we also share common values, as the world’s two largest democracies, and as countries that are rich in diversity, with deep and close connections among our people.

Education and development is one of the five principal areas of collaboration between our two nations. President Obama and Prime Minister Singh have both put education at the forefront of their national agendas. In their Joint Statement of U.S.-India Strategic Dialogue on June 4, 2010, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and External Affairs Minister, Shri S.M. Krishna reaffirmed that it is through cooperation on education and development that global challenges are met — from food security to public health, from climate change to workforce development and women's empowerment.

- The 21st Century demands a new brand of cooperation on Education. The two countries committed to building an enhanced India-U.S. strategic partnership in education that seeks to advance solutions to the defining global challenges that their countries face. Expanding higher education cooperation through increased exchanges and greater academic collaboration, as well as enhancing the role of the private sector, are important elements to this strategic approach.
- The United States and India enjoy a long tradition of educational exchanges, and have increased it substantially in the last year. Since 1950, the bilateral U.S.-India Education Foundation established by the two governments has awarded more than 8,200 Fulbright, Fulbright-Nehru, and other scholarships to U.S. and Indian students in every field of human endeavor. The bi-national Fulbright-Nehru Scholarship Program was expanded through a 45% increase in funding by each government to support increased exchanges of students and scholars in priority fields, bringing total support for these scholarships to \$6.7 million this year.
- To meet the serious demands of the 21st Century, the Obama-Singh 21st Century Knowledge Initiative will provide \$10 million in combined funding to increase university linkages and support junior faculty development between U.S. and Indian universities.

On June 2nd, Presidents and Deans of many U.S. Universities met India's Minister for Human Resource Development, Mr. Kapil Sibal at Washington DC and expressed their desire to set up higher education institutions in India and to partner with reputable institutions in India in various fields. They appreciated the process of academic reforms initiated in India and said that they would like to be active partners in the growth story of Indian education. During his visit the minister addressed the Council on Foreign Relations, an important U.S. think-tank, and gave his vision of education reforms as also the strategic partnership between India and USA.

Education is the key to success for the citizens of our increasing globalized, high-tech, inter-connected, increasingly mobile world of today and tomorrow. And not only education in the traditional sense and in the form with which I grew up, but education that is flexible, transportable, relevant to jobs and to industry, and that lasts one's whole life.

During my years as an American diplomat I have had the chance first hand to see the value of international education and educational exchange. There is no greater influence on international understanding - - and through it on peace and progress – than that which comes from opportunities for people of different countries and cultures to meet each other and spend time in each other's countries. And while visits are good and work opportunities are even better, no overseas experience is more powerful or more meaningful than education. To quote from *The Thirukkural*:

“Thaamin-puruvathu ulakin purakkandu
Kaamuruvar kattrarin-thaar”

i.e.

The wealth of worldly knowledge multiplies in exchange;
The wise loves to pursue it with delight

I want to highlight some notable facts and figures of the educational relationship between India and America:

-- 103,260. The number of Indians currently studying at U.S. colleges and universities. They make up the largest single foreign group of the total of 671,000 foreign students from over 200 countries studying in the U.S. The current number of Indian students in the U.S. is more than triple the 1998-1999 level of 37,000.

-- 262,416. The number of American students who study abroad each year. This number has grown by about 10% annually over the past decade, and I am very pleased to note that India is growing in popularity as a destination for American students. Last year, India entered the list of the top twenty destinations, and this year the number grew by another 20%. We are actively working with American and Indian institutions to establish academic linkages and to encourage Americans to study in India.

Higher education is one of the brightest areas of people-to-people contact between our nations. It is striking how important and valued education is in both of our societies. Well educated Indian Americans are at the vanguard of the U.S. economy, and have made important contributions in numerous fields including technology, science, medicine, and the arts. We are pleased that so many bright Indian students choose to study in the United States, and we welcome them in the corridors of our colleges and universities.

There are several types of colleges and universities in the United States. Those include public or state-run institutions, private schools, colleges sponsored by religious groups and others. Historically Black Colleges and Universities have played a very important role in the experience of African Americans and, indeed, in American history in general.

Founded at a time when legal segregation and pervasive racial prejudice limited educational opportunities for African Americans, the Historically Black Colleges and Universities have evolved to fulfill new roles in the contemporary United States. More than 100 Historically Black Colleges today educate more than a quarter million students. About four-fifths of those students are African American, but thousands of others enroll for reasons of educational quality, and for the opportunity to enjoy a unique cultural experience.

One of the greatest Americans of the 20th century happens to be a graduate of a Historically Black College, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Dr. King and the civil rights movement he led in the 1950s and 1960s played a crucial role in bringing about a more free, more equitable and more open America.

One cannot truly talk about Martin Luther King, Jr. without including one of India's own greatest citizens, Mahatma Gandhi. These two great figures never actually met, but Gandhiji's teachings and philosophy, particularly the doctrines of non-violent resistance, service to the community and social justice, were a huge influence on King and through him on the civil rights movement in America. Interestingly, their contact came thanks to one of the institutions I described earlier, a Historically Black College. Dr. King's first exposure to Gandhi's teachings came when he enrolled at Morehouse College in Atlanta, one of America's leading Historically Black Colleges. The then-Principal of Morehouse College was Dr. Benjamin Elijah Mays, who had visited India and had become a disciple of Gandhi. Mays became a great influence on King, and there, at this Historically Black College, Mays passed to King the light of Gandhian principles, a light that became a torch.

Through his studies under Mays and his own subsequent visit to India in 1959, Dr. King accepted that torch and then carried it farther, taking it throughout the United States. He held it high until his assassination in 1968, but it has been kept burning in America by the civil rights

movement. Now it falls to you, the next generation to take this torch and the Gandhian principles it symbolizes, to use it to light our paths, and to carry it into the future.

I know that the education and other experiences you, the students, are receiving here at Madras University are preparing you to do just that. The world expects a great deal of you, but I am confident you will answer the call and carry forward the torch.

In conclusion, I would like to quote another famous couplet from Thirukkural:

“thottanaithu oorum manarkeni maantharikku
kattranithu oorum arivu”

i.e.

“The deeper you dig the sand, the higher a spring flows;
The ardor you devote to learning, the fuller is knowledge”

Thank you.